

Hayden was longest serving member of Congress

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WASHINGTON - As the soft-spoken chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee and Senate president pro tempore, Carl Hayden was a legislative giant who was instrumental in the evolution of modern Arizona, with the 1968 creation of the Central Arizona Project water-delivery system perhaps his greatest achievement.

He also was a fixture on Capitol Hill for 56 years, representing Arizona for 20,773 days - a milestone that remained unmatched until this week.

On Wednesday, Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.V., will mark his 20,774th day on the Hill, making him the new longest-serving member of Congress and robbing Arizona of a longtime political claim to fame. Byrd, who turns 92 on Friday, entered the House on Jan. 3, 1953, and moved to the Senate on Jan. 3, 1959.

But a broken record will not diminish a Hayden legacy that includes the 336-mile CAP aqueduct network, Glen Canyon Dam and the Kitt Peak National Observatory.

"He really was a champion of the development and growth of the American West," said Jack August, an Arizona political historian and author of the 1998 book "Vision in the Desert: Carl Hayden and Hydropolitics in the American Southwest."

"He had no qualms about using federal taxpayer money to help develop the infrastructure: water, power, highways - those types of things that we take for granted."

Hayden, a Democrat, entered the House on Feb. 19, 1912, as Arizona's first representative. He ascended to the Senate in 1927 and served a then-unprecedented seven consecutive terms before retiring on Jan. 3, 1969, at age 91. He died three years later, on Jan. 25, 1972.

Historians, colleagues and other Arizona politicians say Hayden should be remembered as more than a trivia question or just the namesake of Carl Hayden Community High School in west Phoenix. Hayden was a respected leader who, despite their party differences, counted iconic conservative Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., as a friend. Hayden's use of his position to funnel spending and resources to the state markedly contrasts with the anti-pork and anti-earmark sentiment of the man who now holds his old Senate seat, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

"To me, he was the most honest politician that I'd ever known or even heard about," said Roy Elson, Hayden's longtime Senate chief of staff. "He was just an institution in himself in that he did things all over the country, not just in Arizona."

Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, the third-longest-serving senator in history and the current Senate Appropriations Committee chairman, praised Hayden as "a powerful and gracious man," fondly remembering "his quiet manner" and frequent lunch invitations.

"We both entered the Congress when our states were in their infancy and shared the bond of being our state's first elected members of Congress," said Inouye, who joined the Senate in 1963. "He brought a firm but kind demeanor to his dealings, and I am humbled to have shared some of his time in the Senate."

Tempe's favorite son

Hayden was born Oct. 2, 1877, in Hayden's Ferry, soon to be renamed Tempe, in the building that today is Monti's La Casa Vieja restaurant on Mill Avenue. Hayden served on the Tempe Town Council and as territorial Maricopa County sheriff before winning a 1911 special election to go to Congress upon Arizona's admission to the union.

His life spanned an era of rapid technological advancement that took him "from the advent of automobiles to voting for funds to send people to the moon," August, the historian, said.

Hayden remained a popular figure in Tempe, where he enjoyed a warm homecoming around the time of his final Senate race in 1962. Hayden, then in his 80s and facing whispers about his

advanced age and health issues, still was able to weather a bitter challenge from future Republican Gov. Evan Mecham.

"I put a sign in my yard for him, and I went to one of his political meetings, and I heard him speak and I shook his hand," recalled Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., a former Tempe mayor. "He spoke Spanish, and he was greeting people in Spanish, too. Everybody knew that he was powerful and that he was quiet. He was powerful because of his seniority and because he got things done."

'The Silent Senator'

Politicians and former staff members who knew Hayden inevitably mention his low-key and easygoing style. But his economical use of words meant that whenever Hayden talked, his colleagues listened.

"He was known as 'the Silent Senator,' but he used silence as a form of political power," August said.

Despite his nice-guy reputation, Hayden was hard-nosed when it came to protecting Arizona's water supplies and tangled with California's congressional delegation over the Colorado River throughout his career in Washington.

His efforts culminated late in his final Senate term with passage of the CAP legislation. The idea to deliver Colorado River water into Arizona was a priority of the state's bipartisan delegation for years, but Hayden got much, if not most, of the credit because of his prominence and influence in the Senate. Upon signing it into law, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed Sept. 30, 1968, as "Carl Hayden Day."

"To tell you the truth, he was a very obliging person, a very courteous person," recalled Stewart Udall, an Arizona congressman from 1955 to 1961 and secretary of the Interior from 1961 to 1969. "He was chairman of the Appropriations Committee for such a long time and had done so many favors for other senators and congressmen, if he made a request for them to support something like the Central Arizona Project, of course they would go along."

End of an era

Hayden declined to seek an eighth Senate term in 1968. "I tried talking the senator into running again," said Elson, his longtime aide. "He said, 'Roy, you know it. This is the time to retire.' And he came back home."

Goldwater, who'd been out of the Senate since his unsuccessful 1964 presidential campaign, ran for and won the seat, defeating Elson, the Democratic nominee. Goldwater said he wouldn't have run had Hayden decided to try for re-election.

"They were very close, and Goldwater always said, 'Leave Senator Hayden alone' when election time came," Udall said.

Hayden's 1972 funeral was held at Gammage Auditorium on the Arizona State University campus in Tempe. Goldwater and Johnson were his eulogists, bringing together the two rivals of the hard-fought 1964 White House race. Johnson saluted Hayden as every state's "third senator" because of his national contributions.

McCain won the retiring Goldwater's seat in 1986. He said he still often thinks of his predecessors, noting that for a small, growing state, Arizona in the 20th century produced far more than its share of national leaders.

"Carl Hayden's bust is here in the Russell (Senate Office) Building, and I pass by it every single day," McCain said.